

Just Another Chapter in the Life of the Essex

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Our squadron went aboard the Essex in the Ulthi anchorage on Christmas December 1944. Nothing unusual about that except I was a member of the first Marine fighter squadron to supplement Navy Air Groups in WWII - VMF-124/VMF-213. We joined Navy Air Group 4 with 36 F4U-2s and 54 pilots, 4 ground officers, and 120 enlisted. Our carrier qualifications were minimal, our navigation was strictly VFR, and instrument flight was for someone else. All that changed in a hurry once the fleet left Ulthi. You might say that we enjoyed on-the-job training for the next several weeks. And a great expense, for we lost 7 pilots and 13 Corsairs during the first 10 days of operations - none due to enemy action. But we learned, and became an integral part of Air Group 4. Our skipper, LtCol Bill Millington became the first and only Marine to become a Navy CAG when Cdr Otto Klinsmann was lost during an operation. Millington was the next senior Navy Aviator so took over command. He continued in this position until Air Group 4 was ordered home. We enjoyed a typhoon in the South China Seas, flights escorting TBM's over Okinawa, visiting Tokyo to disrupt their material flow, and flying thru the flack to support the beachhead at Iwo Jima. All in all, a well-rounded education for the first Marine fighter squadrons to operate from the Essex class carrier. Had fun at the time, was scared like everyone else, and wouldn't want to do it again.